



PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Avian Influenza

The Disease

Avian influenza is also called bird flu. Bird flu is caused by a virus that occurs naturally in wild birds. Wild birds usually don't get sick from the virus, but they can pass it on to domesticated birds like chickens, turkeys and ducks, which can get very sick and die.

Bird flu viruses and human flu viruses are similar, but they are not exactly the same. Bird flu viruses mainly infect birds. They do not usually infect humans. But over time, bird flu viruses could change and spread among humans. Public health officials are concerned that the bird flu virus could one day be able to infect humans and spread easily from person to person.

The first case of human infection with bird flu was reported in 1997. Since then, more than 100 human cases have been reported in Asia. Half of the infected people died.

Bird flu is spread when infected birds shed the virus in their saliva, nasal secretions and droppings. Public health officials believe people were infected with bird flu after they had contact with these bodily fluids, or surfaces contaminated with these fluids. There is no danger from eating poultry or eggs, as long as they are fully cooked.

Asian officials have killed millions of birds to control the spread of bird flu. Outbreaks of birds have occurred in Canada, Europe and the U.S. But to date, there have been no human cases of bird flu reported in the U.S. Experts around the world are watching the bird flu situation carefully and are preparing for the possibility that the virus may begin to spread from person to person.

Symptoms of Avian Flu

Bird flu can cause flu-like symptoms in humans, such as fever, cough, sore throat and muscle aches. Symptoms may also include eye infection, pneumonia and severe breathing problems, possibly leading to death. Up to 10 days may pass between being exposed to the virus and developing these symptoms.

Diagnosis

Your healthcare provider can perform a test for influenza. If this test is positive, other testing can be done to determine the specific influenza strain, including bird flu.

Treatment

People who are infected with bird flu can become very sick. Treatment may include hospitalization, supportive care and/or the use of drugs known as antivirals. In order for antivirals to be effective they must be started within 48 hours of symptom onset. There is currently no licensed vaccine to prevent avian influenza in humans, but research and testing are ongoing. Antibiotics are not effective against any influenza.

Reducing Your Risk

Protect yourself from avian flu by taking the same steps you would to guard yourself against colds and other human influenza viruses.

- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you sneeze or cough.
- Wash your hands with soap and water frequently throughout the day, especially after coughing or sneezing. Soap does not need to be antibacterial soap.
- Stay home from work or school when you are ill.

Consult your healthcare provider if symptoms persist or become severe. Tell your healthcare provider if you have traveled to an area where bird flu has been reported.

When you plan to travel abroad, check the CDC website (www.cdc.gov), or call their hotline at 1-888-246-2675 for the latest travel advice. If you plan to travel to countries with known outbreaks of avian influenza, avoid poultry farms, contact with live animals in live food markets and any surfaces suspected to be contaminated with bird or animal droppings.

For More Information

Talk to your healthcare provider

Call the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS)
Communicable Disease Service at 609-588-7500

Visit the DHSS website at visit www.nj.gov/health/flu

Call the CDC toll-free at 1-800-CDC-INFO (4636) for assistance in English and Spanish (TTY 1-888-232-6348)

Visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/>

E-mail the CDC at cdcinfo@cdc.gov